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## Magic, Demons and Apocalypse in the Composition of *Historia Arcana* by Procopius of Caesarea

The famous description of emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora as blood-thirsty demons bent on destruction of humankind (*HA* 12.13) has inspired a tumultuous discussion amongst scholars. The *Secret History* of Procopius initially seemed to be so different from *Wars* and *Buildings* that some either doubted it was composed by the same author (e.g. John Bagnell Bury<sup>1</sup>) or tried to explain it as a product of mental anguish, bitterness of spirit and even schizophrenia (e.g. James Allan Stewart Evans<sup>2</sup>). For 30 years the scholarship has concentrated more on the structure and generic aspects of *Historia Arcana* than on its place among other works of Procopius or its literary and historical value (see Averil Cameron; Anthony Kaldellis). While the language and allusive nature of *Secret History* has been touched upon by many scholars, it has never been thoroughly investigated. Though the current study by no means aspires to present a comprehensive literary analysis of *Historia Arcana*, nonetheless I would like to discuss the linguistic, artistic and intertextual aspects of the ‘demonic passage’ (*HA* 12.13–32) and the recurring references to Justinian and Theodora as demons throughout the *Secret History*. I also intend to trace the mythological and apocalyptic references present in the work, which in my opinion are important for both the composition and overall interpretation of *Historia Arcana*.

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<sup>1</sup> I agree in the main with the opinion of [Leopold von] Ranke (*Weltgeschichte: Die Römische Republik und ihre Weltherrschaft*, 1886) that Procopius is not the author, but that the work was nevertheless founded on a diary or ephemeris of that historian; that a member of the opposition, probably of the green faction, having obtained possession of the diary or a copy of it, worked it up into the form of the *Secret History*, incorporating all the calumnies which were afloat about the Emperor and the Empress” (1889, vol. 1: 355).

<sup>2</sup> “Scholars have always recognized a certain schizophrenia in Procopius’s attitude towards Justinian, but it was not easy to produce an explanation” (1968: 136).

The demonic passage is placed roughly in the middle of the work (in the twelfth out of thirty chapters). Procopius starts the *Secret History* with an introduction (1.1–10), where he admits his fear that his memories of Justinian and Theodora's reign will be viewed as myths (μυθολογία) by future readers or that he will be considered one of tragic poets (literally, those who teach by writing tragedies: τοῖς τραγωδοδιδασκάλοις).<sup>3</sup> He claims that he was at first stopped from writing down the nefarious deeds of Belisarius, Antonina, Justinian and Theodora, lest they become inspiration for future tyrants (τοῖς τυράννοις), yet he finally came to the conclusion that their fate can be seen as an example of the punishment that awaits depraved rulers (as well as a consolation for their unfortunate victims). He gives the examples of Semiramis (who led “life full of debauchery,” τὸν ἀκόλαστον βίον, 1.9, an obvious allusion to Theodora) and the mad Sardanapalus. Both were probably drawn from Diodorus Siculus (2.4–28), who in turn based his account on *Persica* by Ctesias of Cnidos (though *Persica* is currently lost,<sup>4</sup> it might have been available to Procopius as the work is abridged in Photios's *Bibliotheca*) and on another *Persica* by Deinon,<sup>5</sup> as well as an account of Athenaeus, a historian.<sup>6</sup> The third example of a depraved ruler who was as mad as Sardanapalus is Nero, whose reign was described by Tacitus and Cassius Dio. The examples do not seem to be coincidental. According to Diodorus, Semiramis was no mere mortal, but an uncommonly beautiful half-goddess, daughter of Derketo (identified with Astarte by Herodotus, 1.105), who was brought up as an orphan and managed to rise from a low station to the heights of power due to the extraordinary love of king Ninus, then used her ambition and bravery to conquer new lands and strengthen the country. Theodora is portrayed by Procopius as a woman of great beauty, raised to the throne from poverty and obscurity due to the unusual love of Justinian. She is also described as an inhuman demonic creature with extraordinary powers, yet Procopius does not deny her ambition and bravery. Semiramis was also viewed as a prostitute who captured Ninus by her feminine allurements (Diodorus 2.20, Plutarch *Mor.* 753d–e),<sup>7</sup> just like Theodora who captivated Justinian (9.31). Both views are ba-

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that history was written as tragedy, with the purpose of teaching the readers, by one of the most known historians, Tacitus. Procopius, as a lawyer, was well versed in Latin (see Cameron 1996: 222) and it is entirely possible that Tacitus's works were familiar to him. Further passages in *HA* seem to confirm the plausibility of at least passing knowledge of Tacitus (e.g. a comment that Nero's madness would not be known if the historian of his age did not give a testimony of it in his work; 1.9).

<sup>4</sup> A fragment survived on the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus (*P. Oxy.* 2330).

<sup>5</sup> A 4th-century-BC author that became a source for the historian Ephorus, who *floruit* at the end of 4th c. Deinon's account of Persian history was used and transmitted by Plutarch, Athenaeus of Naucratis and Cornelius Nepos; for further details see Amélie Kuhrt (2007: 8–9).

<sup>6</sup> He lived in 4th c. BC, not to be confused with Athenaeus of Naucratis, author of *Deipnosophistai*.

<sup>7</sup> For description of Semiramis in Greek and Roman literature see Deborah Levine Gera (1996: 65–83).

sed on the versions transmitted by Diodorus: while Ctesias described Semiramis as a courageous warrior woman who won Ninus's love due to her bravery, intelligence and beauty, Deinon contradicted him, reporting that she was a courtesan (a version of the legend which seems to have been widespread: Pliny the Elder also mentions a painting of Semiramis the courtesan, 35. 78)<sup>8</sup>. Christian writers portrayed her in a wholly unflattering way; the best example is Orosius (*Hist. adv. pag.* 1.4) who describes at length her man-like ambition, her desire to expand the boundaries of the empire without regard for the bloodshed bath such a pursuit would end in, and calls her "burning with lust" (*libidine ardens*) and "blood-thirsty" (*sanguinem sitiens*), a murderess who ruthlessly killed her lovers and committed incest, perhaps even identifying her with the "Whore of Babylon" from Revelation 17.5. All of these legendary characteristics of Semiramis are used by Procopius in his description of Theodora: she is a woman of great beauty (*HA* 10.11); she is a murderess (of her unborn children, *HA* 10.3, and of her grown-up illegitimate son, *HA* 17.16–23; her political enemies, e.g. *HA* 15.22, 3. 6–8, in particular Amalasuntha, the queen of Goths, *HA* 16.1–5); she is a prostitute (*HA* 9. 2–14); she is cruel to her lovers (*HA* 9.15), and though she never committed incest herself, she actively supported Antonina, wife of Belisarius, in her liaison with the general's adopted son, Theodosius (*HA* 3.11–19). Additionally, Theodora fits the description of the "Whore of Babylon" who is an allegory of evil in female form, mother of prostitutes and all disgusting things, drunk on blood of saints and martyrs: she was supposed to sit on seven mountains, which might be interpreted as Rome (Theodora was, of course, the ruler of the Roman Empire). Both she and Justinian wanted to expand the empire and regain the lands lost to the barbarians, though their deeds did not result in strengthening the country, but in laying waste to prosperous lands and the slaughter of their inhabitants (Procopius provides an extensive account of the desolation of Libya and Europe in *HA* 18.4–24).

There are also other possible correlations between Semiramis and Theodora. Semiramis is known to have started the practice of castrating boys (see e.g. Ammianus Marcellinus 14.6, Eutropius 1.339); Justinian was responsible for a law against pederasty, according to which all those found guilty were castrated – and, as Procopius observes (and underlines by his usage of *dualis*), Justinian and Theodora have ruled the empire together (none of them did a thing without the involvement of the other, *HA* 10.13), hence it might be implied that Theodora played an active part in the creation of the law. Another allusion to Semiramis could be the practice of proskynesis, the obeisance of which was religiously demanded by Theodora (*HA* 15.15: προσκυνήσαντες μόνον καὶ ταρσοῦ ἑκατέρου ποδὸς ἄκρῳ χεῖλει ἀψάμενοι). Proskynesis was invented in Persia (Herodotus 1.134), though it happened under the Achemenid dynasty in 6th c. BC, not during the legendary reign of Semiramis, the founder of Babylon. Finally, the connection of Semiramis

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<sup>8</sup> See also Ovid *Amores* 1.5.11.

with magic forms another important basis for comparison. She was born a half-goddess, daughter of Derketo (identified with Venus, Atargatis and Isis, goddesses of fertility and magic) and a mortal man (incidentally, her foster father was a royal shepherd, while both father and foster-father of Theodora were keepers of bears, the former for the Green faction, the latter for the Blue). Thus, her nature is not human and can be described as “demonic”, especially if we consider that pagan gods used to be called demons by Christians; a prime example of such a practice is provided by Procopius himself when he describes the inhabitants of Thule in *Wars* 6.15.23, saying that they worship demons of earth, air and sea, as well as those of springs and rivers. Similarly, Theodora is not human – she is a demon in a woman’s body, as Procopius reiterates in the *Secret History*. Semiramis was also believed to be a contemporary of Zoroaster<sup>9</sup> who was widely regarded as a founder of magic and astrology as “scientific” disciplines. It seems that a mere association with Semiramis was supposed to cast aspersion on Theodora as a magic user.

The other example of a real ruler who became a legend is Sardanapalus. Diodorus remarks (after Ctesias) that under his rule the Assyrian empire, which lasted for thirteen centuries, came to an end and was conquered by Medes (2.21). This is probably the most salient point of quoting Sardanapalus in the preface to *Historia Arcana*: Procopius implies that the deeds of Justinian might have led to the destruction of the empire which came under attack from the Huns and other barbarians, including Medes (as he calls the Sassanid empire under Chosroes, *HA* 11.11). Though the Byzantine empire did not fall as a result of these wars (at least not for another millennium), nonetheless Chosroes was quite successful and there was no foreseeable permanent end to the on-going war. Other features of Sardanapalus, such as his indolence, effeminate behaviour and excessive indulgence in drinking and sexual pleasures are irrelevant because they cannot be applied to Justinian as presented by Procopius. There is no reference to magic or inhumanity here, only an allusion that an emperor can be the ruin of his country. The third ruler mentioned in the preface is Nero, whose madness caused the destruction of Rome in a great fire (Cassius Dio 62.16). Nero, unlike Sardanapalus, was a learned magician and astrologer (see Pliny the Elder 30.5–6), hence Procopius might have placed him in the preface to foreshadow the inhuman, demonic nature of Justinian.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> ‘In his legendary accounts, Ctesias refers to wars carried on between Ninus and Semiramis and Ὀξυάρτης (variants, Ἐξαόρτης, Χαόρτης, Ζαόρτης); the allusion in Oxyartes ... is not to Zoroaster, although Cephalion, Justin and Arnobius, who draw on Ctesias, make Zoroaster a Bactrian and the opponent of Ninus’, Abraham Valentine Williams Jackson 1926: 187.

<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that both Sardanapalus and Nero were depicted in the literary tradition as effeminate. Nero was constantly under the influence of women, first his mother, then his wife; Justinian was controlled by Theodora, as his great love for her was either madness, or enchantment. As he shares all his actions and decisions with a woman, he is not fully “male”, and therefore not fully human. The inversion of the traditional gender roles might also be a part of the construction of *HA* as an invective (see McClanan 2002: 14).

The preface is followed by description of Belisarius and Antonina (HA 1–5). In the very first sentence Procopius states that Belisarius had a wife whose father and grandfather were chariot drivers in Byzantium and Thessalonica, while her mother was a prostitute. At first sight it might seem this is a standard point of a typical invective: the debasement of ancestors was a part of the comments against the ‘estate’, i.e. external qualities, not dependent on the person who was the target of the invective. John of Sardis in his commentary on *Progymnasmata* of Aphthonius deems invective and praise as two opposing “sub-species” of encomion (in chapter 9, “On Invective”). Aelius Theon in his *Progymnasmata* describes in minute detail how an encomion should be built,<sup>11</sup> mentioning that the invective ought to be constructed according to the same schema. Yet Procopius is not merely following here the dictates of rhetorical composition; he is setting the underlying theme for the whole *Historia Arcana*. The chariot drivers were regarded in late antiquity as magicians. The best known literary evidence can be found in Ammianus Marcellinus and his tale of the charioteer Hilarinus who apprenticed his own son to a magician (30.3.3), or in Hieronymus’s *Vita Hilarionis* (20) where a Christian chariot driver from Palestine sought the saint’s help against a rival who used magic against him and his horses. There is also ample archaeological evidence: *defixiones*, i.e. magical tablets, with inscribed curses against charioteers from rivalling factions, found most of all in the northern Africa and Syria and dated from the 2nd century AD onwards. When Procopius says that Antonina spent as a young girl a lot of time with “masters of magical arts” who associated with her father-charioteer (φαρμακεῦσί τε πατρώοις, HA 1.12) and “learned from them everything she needed,” he states explicitly that she learned magic. He adds that she led a dissolute life, therefore it can be concluded that the magical arts must have been used mainly for erotic purposes: gaining and sustaining love of a man (the very term φαρμακεία, equivalent of Latin *veneficium*, was generally used to describe love magic). Antonina, says Proco-

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<sup>11</sup> As we read: External goods are, first, good birth, and that is twofold, either from the goodness of (a man’s) city and tribe and constitution, or from ancestors and other relatives. Then there is education, friendship, reputation, official position, wealth, good children, a good death. Goods of the body are health, strength, beauty, and acuteness of sense. Important ethical virtues are goods of the mind and the actions resulting from these; for example, that a person is prudent, temperate, courageous, just, pious, generous, magnanimous, and the like. Fine actions are those praised after death – for people are wont to flatter the living – and conversely, the actions praised when we are alive and yet overcoming the envy of many; for as Thucydides says, envy is in rivalry with the living. Fine actions are also those done for others rather than ourselves; and done for the sake of the honourable, not the expedient or the pleasant; and in which the toil is that of the doer but the benefit is common; and through which the populace experiences benefits and which are done for the benefactors and even more for those who are dead; thus they are praised more than retributions and dangers on behalf of friends (110; translated by George Alexander Kennedy, 2003: 50).

pius, subjugated her husband Belisarius with various magical arts (τὸν ἄνδρα μαγγανείαις πολλαῖς κατέλιθεν, *HA* 1.13) in order to make him blind to her numerous infidelities. Belisarius was so befuddled that he overlooked even blatant evidence of her conduct, as when he caught her *in flagranti* in a cellar with his adopted son Theodosius (*HA* 1.18–20).

The affair with Theodosius is the main linking element in Procopius's invective against Antonina. When a slave woman named Macedonia and two slave boys secretly informed Belisarius of her adultery, she managed to convince him "either by magic or by flattery" (ἢ μαγγανεύσασα ἢ θωπεύσασα) that the accusations were baseless, wheedled the names of the domestics from her husband and murdered them all, first cutting off their tongues (taking from them the power of speech, as a punishment for delation), then quartering them alive, sewing them in sacks and throwing into the sea (*HA* 1.13; apart from the cruelty intentionally used in this depiction to emphasise one of Theodora's main character traits, Procopius might have meant to make this passage an allusion to sorceress Medea, who quartered Absyrtus and threw his remains into the sea). She also persuaded her husband to kill Constantinus, who in the midst of the debacle had told him it was better to dispose of a wife than the adopted son (*HA* 1.14). When Theodosius became afraid that the whole affair would finally come to light and absconded to a monastery in Ephesus, Antonina was distraught and behaved as if in mourning, then she forced Belisarius to emulate her behaviour and beg the emperor and empress to bring Theodosius back. Theodosius refused. When Belisarius with his other adopted son Photius (child of Antonina from a previous marriage) went on a campaign against Chosroes, Antonina decided to stay behind in Byzantium and arrange for Theodosius to come back to her. Procopius says that she always went with Belisarius on his military campaigns, afraid that her love magic would lose its strength if they were to be separated for extended periods of time (*HA* 2.1). Her fears proved right. Photius, who was constantly barraged by ridicule and derision by paid retainers who received the orders to do so from his mother, heard from an acquaintance that Theodosius was staying with Antonina in Byzantium. He told his adopted father the truth. Belisarius became enraged and begged Photius to help him punish Theodosius; he admitted he loved his wife too much to bring her any harm. They decided to wait until Theodosius went back to Ephesus and Antonina arrived from Byzantium. Yet in the meantime Antonina gained favour of the empress Theodora by laying a trap for John the Cappadocian, the Praetorian Prefect of the East (thus proving her prowess as a witch, because John was a sorcerer himself, see *Wars* 1.25.4–10). Because of his desire to meet with Antonina, Belisarius neglected the campaign and made a decision which enabled Chosroes to safely move his army away from Colchid.

Procopius brings up an anecdote about Chosroes, who, when vituperated by some of his soldiers on account of the unlawful intrusion into the Roman territory during a peace treaty, read aloud a letter from the empress Theodora to

a Persian diplomat Zaberganes, wherein she confessed that her husband had never made any decisions without prior consultation with her; then he claimed that a state ruled by a woman is not truly a state and all treaties are void. Though it is a direct attack on Theodora, placing it in this particular passage allows Procopius to underline the parallel between Antonina and the empress: both ruled their husbands. As long as Belisarius was enchanted by his wife, he could not be a good commander. His susceptibility to the witchcraft of Antonina made him an oath-breaker and finally brought upon him the wrath of God (*HA* 3.30). When the empress Theodora forced him to reconcile with Antonina and tortured Photius to gain information on the whereabouts of Theodosius (whom he abducted and imprisoned), Belisarius chose to forget about the oaths he had sworn to Photius and did nothing to help him. Theodosius was retrieved and presented as a gift ('precious pearl') to Antonina, while Photius, after three years of imprisonment and unsuccessful escapes, had a dream of the prophet Zacharias who promised to help him in another attempt to run away<sup>12</sup>. This time Photius escaped to Jerusalem and became a monk, successfully evading Antonina and Theodora. While he was rewarded for his bravery and faithfulness, Theodosius fell ill and died, and Belisarius never recovered his good name, falling prey to misfortune after misfortune: an unsuccessful campaign against Chosroes who managed to capture city of Callinicus, with thousands of Roman citizens (*HA* 3.31); denunciation and loss of power due to the fact that when Justinian fell ill with the bubonic plague and came close to death, Belisarius talked with Buses on who might gain imperial power after the emperor's passing, only to be discovered and punished by Theodora (*HA* 4.1–17); his humiliating subjugation to Antonina,<sup>13</sup> after Theodora convinced him that his life was spared only because of her intercession on his behalf (*HA* 4.18–31); his unsuccessful campaign in Italy where "God no longer looked upon him with favour and his situation was becoming worse daily" (*HA* 4.39–5.16); the fate of his daughter who was forced by Theodo-

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<sup>12</sup> This is an example of a miracle (saint's intervention) as opposed to the magic practiced by Antonina. Photius deserves his happy ending, while the accomplices (and victims) of the witch do not escape punishment for their lack of resistance and willingness to assist and break the most solemn of vows: Theodosius dies prematurely and Belisarius is humiliated and plagued with misfortunes. Only the witch herself, Antonina, seems not to be punished.

<sup>13</sup> The behaviour of Belisarius during the whole debacle is described as "unmanly": mortally afraid for his life he sat in solitude in his chamber, without any noble thought, not recalling that he was a man, he was drenched with sweat, reeling and shaking in his hopeless despair, fearing only for his life, like the basest of slaves, not a true man. When a messenger from court arrived, he lay down and awaited death, with no courage left, only to be handed a letter with pardon from the empress, saying that he owed his life to Antonia. Then, upon seeing his wife, he prostrated himself at her feet, kissed them and embraced her knees, calling her his saviour and swearing he will forever remain the most faithful of her slaves (*HA* 4: 19–30). The slave-like behaviour of Belisarius might be another allusion to love magic practiced by Antonina.

ra to marry the empress's grandson, only to become separated from her beloved husband by Antonina after the empress's death: this was effected without a word of protest from Belisarius, despite the fact that such an action was bound to ruin the girl's reputation (*HA* 5. 18–24).

Belisarius is portrayed as an unmanly, cowardly slave of his wife, subjugated by love magic and unable to muster any resistance. His unnatural, ardent love for Antonina is emphasised throughout *Historia Arcana* (even after his humiliation he is madly in love with the sixty-year-old woman and follows her to Italy, *HA* 4.41) and is finally labelled as stupidity (after Theodora's death those who believed his actions were guided by his fear of the empress discovered that all that time he had been ordered around by his wife, and ridiculed him as a madman, *HA* 5.27). The greatest faults of Belisarius are his unquestioning obeisance to his wife and his lack of courage. It is Antonina whom Procopius portrays as a true villain and the invective is constructed around her persona: it is her ignominious descent and youth (magical education, bastard children and capturing an influential husband) which are described at the beginning; her unquenchable lust and murderous inclinations, oath-breaking and the thirst for bloody revenge; her control over Belisarius which leads to the failure of military campaigns and the wreckage of his family life. All the parts of traditional invective are present (external circumstances, internal qualities, deeds), except for Antonina's death, as she must have been still living when Procopius composed his work. Though, metaphorically speaking, some form of "death" is included in the Procopian invective; after all, the effect of Antonina's life is the ruin of Belisarius, and there is also to be considered the part they both play in the wreckage of the empire. Belisarius is guilty only because he was ruled by his wife. Elizabeth Fisher (1978: 300) rightly observes that the patriarchal stereotype:

implies that women were rightly subject to the control and protection of men because of their naturally disruptive influence upon men and upon society. Women who avoided control by men would be distrusted by their contemporaries, for such women affronted God and society by rejecting the domination generally considered beneficial to all.

Thus Antonina, who rejected all norms of society and manipulated the natural course of events by her usage of magic, becomes the disruptive power, the mastermind behind Belisarius's actions. Procopius can blame her for all the wrongs and misdeeds of his hitherto worshipped general, whose only real fault seems to be the total lack of bravery. The section devoted to Antonina and Belisarius shows how even a good man can become a failure when he is ruled by a woman; an evil man ruled by his wife (like Justinian is by Theodora) becomes a disaster.

Chapter five ends in an episode devoted to Sergius who tried to win the hand of Antonina's granddaughter: it seems to have been added to the narrative hastily and was not properly integrated into the work. The second and the most extensive part of the *Secret History* begins in chapter six, where Procopius states his



purpose in the first sentence: he will talk about Justinian and Theodora: who they truly were and how they led the empire to ruin. He starts again, in accordance with textbook rhetorical rules, with the “external goods”, i.e. the ancestors of Justinian and, in a separate part (chapter nine), those of Theodora. Thus Justinian is presented as a nephew of emperor Justin, a poor villager from Illyria who rose in the court of Anastasius and managed to gain the throne despite his illiteracy and stupidity (which are described with great relish). Procopius relates a curious incident which saved the life of Justin when John the Hunchback threw him into prison: John received a vision for three nights in a row, of “a being who took the shape of a huge body, more powerful than a man on every possible count” (τινα παμμεγέθη τε τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἄλλα κρείσσω ἢ ἄνθρωπῳ εἰκάζεσθαι), who admonished him to let Justin free, otherwise he would meet a terrifying end (*HA* 6.6–9). The apparition seems to be a demon (its inhuman appearance and strength are underlined). Procopius proceeds to malign the wife of Justin, a barbarian and a former slave named Lupicina, who was a concubine of her master before she was freed. Her very name, Lupicina, is suggestive of a prostitute (Latin *lupa*)<sup>14</sup>.

Justin, Procopius says, was unable to either help or harm his subjects, due to his deficient mental faculties and education. But his nephew, who ruled the whole empire as a young man, with Justin still nominally occupying the throne, deluged the empire with uncountable disasters on a scale unheard of since the beginning of the world (*HA* 6.19): the impact of Justinian on the country is described with an apocalyptic flair. He is like a plague sent from the heaven, determined to murder the whole mankind, worse than the bubonic plague which destroyed only half of the population, because he destroyed all Romans. This rhetorical exaggeration moves Justinian and his deeds to the realm of mythology: they are so unfathomable that the human mind is unable to comprehend them otherwise. Justinian is presented at the very start as a mythological monster, a scourge of mankind, a bringer of the apocalypse. His destructive actions would affect even countries outside the borders of the Roman Empire (such as Libya and Italy), because he was not satisfied with the wreckage inflicted on his own subjects (*HA* 6.25). Within the first ten days of his rule he managed to commit murder and break solemn oaths. Chapter seven is devoted to the description of the fights between the two circus factions, the Blues (supported by Justinian) and the Greens, as well as the atrocities they committed without any punishment from the emperor. The apocalyptic theme reoccurs, as their actions (incited and indulged by Justinian) are said to have shaken the empire to its foundations, as if it was plagued by an earthquake or deluge. The apocalyptic events are caused and abetted by the Blues who play the role of a host for the “king of demons”.

In chapter eight Justinian is curiously described not as an evil overlord, but as a silly ass who allows everyone to lead him and his only protest is to prick up

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<sup>14</sup> See Aleksandr Vasiliev (1950: 61), *Justin the First: An Introduction to the Epoch of Justinian the Great*.

his ears. This remark might seem incongruous at first sight, yet it allows to draw two conclusions: firstly, that whatever Justinian did, was done due to the influence of others, especially Theodora, who, as a new Semiramis and a witch, ruled him the same way Antonina ruled Belisarius. Secondly, Procopius might have used the word *ass* symbolically: ass was one of the animal manifestations of the ancient Egyptian god of (among other things) chaos, Seth,<sup>15</sup> who was identified with the Greek Typhon (see Hesiod, *Theog.* 820–880), a dragon-like, half-human Titan<sup>16</sup> bent on destruction. It was one of the deities frequently called upon in magical incantations (e.g. *PGM* 4. 3260, 7. 964, 12.138, 14.20). It might be noted that Typhon greatly resembled the great dragon of Apocalypse (Saint John's Book of Revelation, see 12: 3–17), identified with Satan: an analogy which seems wholly congruent with the subsequent depiction of Justinian as “prince of demons”. The allusion to Seth appears to be even more viable if we take into consideration that the next sentences of the chapter are devoted to the description of chaos caused by Justinian's actions.

The remainder of chapter eight describes the external appearance and character of Justinian. He was rather short and plump, with a healthy complexion, never ruined by his habit of fasting for two days. In short, he resembled best the statue of emperor Domitian preserved on a street leading to the Roman Capitol (*HA* 8.12). Domitian was one of the most hated and vilified emperors, sentenced to *damnatio memoriae*. He was identified with a demon or Antichrist, as Berthold Rubin writes (1960: 58):

The physiognomy is quite similar to historic emperor Domitian. Similar description can be found in much later Book of Elias, where this model is applied to Odenathus. More important is the testimony of Cyril of Jerusalem, who writes that the 11th emperor of Rome

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<sup>15</sup> See Herman te Velde (1967: 13–15) who repeats after B.H. Stricker, *Asinarii I*, OMRO NR 46 (1965: 52–75) that in the Antiquity the other manifestations of the god were gradually replaced by the ass:

“The Seth-animal does not seem to be exclusively an ass, but a mythical animal that if necessary or desired can be connected with various zoologically definable animals. In Graeco-Roman times there is a reluctance, connected with the ending of the official cult of Seth, to depict this mythological animal itself. The earlier multiplicity of approach with zoologically definable animals is also restricted, and the Seth animal is unilaterally replaced by the ass.”

<sup>16</sup> Apollodorus described him thusly (*Bibl.* 1.6.3): ‘a hybrid between man and beast. In size and strength he surpassed all the offspring of Earth. As far as the thighs he was of human shape and of such prodigious bulk that he out-topped all the mountains, and his head often brushed the stars. One of his hands reached out to the west and the other to the east, and from them projected a hundred dragons' heads. From the thighs downward he had huge coils of vipers, which when drawn out, reached to his very head and emitted a loud hissing. His body was all winged: unkempt hair streamed on the wind from his head and cheeks; and fire flashed from his eyes’; translation after *Apollodorus. The Library*. Translated by Sir James George Frazer. Loeb Classical Library Volume 121. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1921.

is known as the Antichrist. The numbers point to Domitian. Another reference to this traditional theme can be found in Symeon Metaphrastes' *Vita S. Dionysii Areopagitae*, where the emperor Domitian is described as Daemonianus [author's note: see MPG 115, 104]. Also Theodoretus mentions Domitian in such terms.<sup>17</sup>

Domitian was also a model tyrant, the first emperor who ordered people to address him as *dominus et deus* (Dio Chrys. 45.1; Suet. *Dom.* 13.1, *Aug.* 53.1; Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.84), therefore his introduction as a character analogous to Justinian allowed Procopius to underline not only the demonic associations, but also the fact that the emperor was a despotic ruler (τύραννος). The physical (and allusive) description of Justinian is followed by a litany of his vices: he is, first of all, a "knave and fool" (μωροκακοήθης). Curiously, a similar word, μωρόκακος, is used in Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblon* (3.162) to describe a person born under the "inglorious" connection of Saturn and Jupiter;<sup>18</sup> the noun must have been used in both astrological literature and the works of the Peripatetics (in character sketches), though the exact source of this term remains unknown, and might have been lost. Nonetheless, the enumeration of vices that follows seems largely similar to what we know from Ptolemy: Justinian was insincere, cunning, hypocritical, a liar and a dissimulator, with no regard for religion and oaths, idle when he was supposed to do anything good (yet industrious if the deed was to be evil, a divergence from Ptolemaic model). His negative traits of character, Procopius says, were blown into inhuman proportions: the nature took from all the mortals their villainy and poured it all into the soul of this one man (*HA* 8.27). The tirade is concluded with the statement that Justinian was a thief robbing people of their property and causing common penury in the empire, yet he spent so much he never had money.

Chapter nine begins with a corresponding characterisation of Theodora: her ignominious descent as a daughter of bear-carer (*HA* 9.2); her early career as a dancer and prostitute (*HA* 9.8–13); her sexual excesses, treatment of her lovers and abortions (*HA* 9.14–19); her scandalous performance in the theatre, where she re-enacted the sexual act of Leda and Zeus in the form of the swan (*HA* 9.20–22); her tour of the empire, during which she continued her career as a prostitute (*HA* 9.27–28); her return to Byzantium, after which emperor Justinian fell madly (and suddenly, as if induced by magic) in love with the girl, showering her with honours (she became a patrician) and money (*HA* 9.29–31).

<sup>17</sup> Translated from the German by the author of the article.

<sup>18</sup> Ptolemy describes a man born under such conjunction as "outrageous, incapable of learning, timorous, highly superstitious, yet regardless of religion, suspicious, averse to children, incapable of friendship, cunning, misjudging, faithless, foolishly wicked, irascible, hypocritical, idle and useless, without ambition, yet regretful, morose, highly reserved, overcautious, and dull" (transl. by J.M. Ashmand, 1822). It is entirely possible that Procopius refers here to an unknown astrological treatise which described the characteristics of a man born on the day of Saturn and Jupiter's conjunction. It is also noteworthy that the conjunction of these two planets usually signified great and destructive events.

Justinian's love was magnified by political reasons, as both of them supported the Blues (Procopius inserts here a vignette on Theodotus, who curbed the outrageous behaviour of the Blues when Justinian could not intervene due to his illness, then paid for this with exile and life as a monk, once the emperor accused him of being a poisoner and a magician; *HA* 9. 35–42). Finally, Justinian forced the dying Justin to pass the law allowing senators to marry courtesans and took Theodora as his wife, three days before Easter Sunday, i.e. on the anniversary of Christ's death (*HA* 9.53) – a fact which seems to confirm Berthold Rubin's theory that Justinian is portrayed in *Historia Arcana* as an Antichrist.

Procopius proceeds to acknowledge at the beginning of chapter nine that he does not feel it necessary to further describe the character of Justinian, as his heinous act of marrying such a woman as Theodora serves as a succinct description of him as a man. Theodora is a sixth-century Semiramis and a tyrant, a mistress of the Roman people who were her slaves and treated her as goddess. She was raised to her high position due to inexplicable and incomprehensible actions of fate (fortune). After a short description of Theodora's physical appearance (beautiful, rather short, pale and with menacingly drawn eyebrows), Procopius states that henceforth he will describe their deeds jointly, as neither of them did anything without the other. Here, as in many later passages, he uses *dualis* (ἐπράξατην) in order to highlight that the actions were performed by both of them. Chapter eleven is devoted to their varied nefarious schemes, with a general linking theme of unnecessary (if not downright detrimental) innovations: implementing administrative, judicial and fiscal reforms, paying off the barbarians (Huns and Medes), erecting buildings, regulating the religious doctrine (Montanists, Sabatians, Arians, Samaritans) and persecuting pagans, pederasts and astrologers. The beginning of chapter twelve starts with the ideas they contrived to confiscate people's money and property (*HA* 12.1–12), and ends in the famous demonological passage on Justinian.

All the "innovations" of Justinian and confiscations of private property on a hitherto unheard-of scale lead Procopius (and most of his contemporaries, as he claims) to behold the imperial couple not as people, but as vengeful demons (δαίμονες παλαμναῖοί τινες), or, as poets say, "bane of the mortals" (βροτολοιγὸν ἦσθην, they are "twin banes": here Procopius again uses *dualis*). The term βροτολοιγὸς was used repeatedly in the *Illiad* as a fixed epithet for Ares, the god of war (from Book 5.31 onwards), and in the same function in Aeschylus (*Supp.* 656). The word παλαμναῖος was also used by Aeschylus (*Eum.* 436), to describe a murderer who is chased by the Furies, an impure person, stained by spilt blood.<sup>19</sup> Procopius proceeds to tell his readers that Justinian and Theodora both

<sup>19</sup> Conversely, it was also an epithet of Zeus, as an Avenger, Punisher of Murderers, see the 12th c. Greek lexicon, *Ethymologicum Magnum* (*Et.Mag.* 647.43). Perhaps Procopius was trying to establish a comparison between Justinian and Zeus (both with the use of similar vocabulary and with the Leda and Zeus tale), who, as a ruler of old pagan gods, was from a Christian point of view a king of demons.

contrived how to destroy the human kind and its works in the easiest and quickest way possible, and then they assumed the human shape (literally, they dressed themselves in human bodies, ἀνθρώπειόν τε ἡμπέσχοντο σῶμα) and became half-demonic, half-human hybrids (ἀνθρωποδαίμονες γεγεννημένοι) in order to shook the foundations of the world (*HA* 12.14). The evidence that they were demons is plenty, yet its most blatant proof is the superhuman strength observable in their deeds. Demons' actions can be easily distinguished from people's, says Procopius, and though throughout the centuries many people gained terrifying strength (either because of good fortune, *Tyche*, i.e. external circumstances, or because of their inherent nature) and single-handedly orchestrated the ruin of cities or even whole countries, yet no one except those two managed to destroy the whole mankind and bring onto the world such terrifying disasters. This statement is an example of *auxesis* (intentional exaggeration of the scope or significance of something), a rhetorical figure used in invective and exploited continuously by Procopius. It is also the basis of his argument that Justinian and Theodora were demons: the magnitude of the disasters is too large to be caused by mere humans.<sup>20</sup> Yet even their demonic nature, he thinks, could not be wholly accountable for the apocalyptic destruction: they were abetted by Fortune (*Tyche*), as the effects of their murderous rage were augmented by earthquakes, plagues and floods. The evil they did was brought about not by human strength, but in some other (incomprehensible) way.

After this "theoretical" passage Procopius provides the evidence of Justinian's demonic nature. First there was the traditional portent preceding his birth (*HA* 12.18–19): the emperor's mother, it was rumoured, confided in a close familiar, that he was not the son of her husband Sabbatios, nor any other man, because before she conceived, an invisible demon visited her and had intercourse with her, and then vanished as if it was a dream. This confirms the historian's claim that Justinian was a half-human hybrid; it also seems to be based either on Greek mythology (there are numerous examples of heroes born out of a union between a mortal woman and a god) or on the scriptures, being a travesty of immaculate conception (which would be fitting for Antichrist). The second proof is provided by the gossip circulating among the courtiers (*HA* 12.20–23). Some of them (all people of sound mental health)<sup>21</sup> stayed with the emperor in the palace till late

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<sup>20</sup> It seems Procopius always stressed that the material he was describing was worthy of his attention, be it wars, buildings, or disasters.

<sup>21</sup> Kaldellis (2004:156) reads this as "pure souls", similarly as in the Loeb English translation (by H. B. Dewing); yet ψυχὴ means not only "soul", but also "mind, understanding", which I believe is the more convincing translation in this context: Procopius is proving in this way that his sources are reliable. Kaldellis's claim that the expression points to the source of the gossip, i.e. monks, seems far-fetched (especially as a monk is introduced in the following sentences), and only serves him as one of the main arguments to prove that the passage effects "ideological realignment by turning against the regime the very people on whom it is most dependent for moral legitimacy".

night and were under the impression that instead of him they saw a phantom. One of them claimed that the emperor would suddenly rise from the throne and perambulate around the chamber; during such walks his head disappeared, but the body went on; then, after a while, the head would reappear. Another courier, standing next to Justinian, saw his face changing into a shapeless blob, with eyebrows and eyes missing from their rightful place, and all the features rearranged; after a while, his face regained its former appearance. Both transformations of Justinian hint at his demonic nature. The Headless One (Ἀκέφαλος)<sup>22</sup> is a deity (or a demon) frequently encountered in the magical papyri (e.g. *PGM* 2.98–117, 7.222–249, 8.64–110), identified with Osiris (god of the underworld and the dead) and Bes (god of good and pleasurable things, protector against evil; represented in art as a short, plump man). One of the papyri (where Akephalos is identified with Osiris, 2.98–117), bears a graphic representation of the god, with magical *voces* inscribed on his body and raised arms in which he holds a wand (or sceptre) and a laurel twig; in the place of his head there are five standards, symbolizing the blood bursting from the wound after the beheading. Pictures of demons in the form of shapeless blobs or with distorted facial features appear quite often in the papyri, e.g. *PGM* 36.1–34 (where it is the representation of Seth – Tiphon), *PGM* 36.231–255, and *PGM* 66.1–11. It is possible that Procopius was familiar with such representations, as his knowledge of magic (judging from the references in the *Secret History*) seems to be at least passing. He was a member of the court with a judicial education: magic, including Christian magic, was rampant in the sixth century and he must have been introduced to some of its basic concepts as the whole first part of *Historia Arcana* is permeated with magical references.

After the magical evidence is provided, Procopius supports his accusation with “ecclesiastical” proof: the word of a holy monk (*HA* 12: 24–27). The monk (a man beloved by God) went to Byzantium to beg the emperor for help to other eremites in his neighbourhood, who were ruthlessly persecuted. He was allowed the audience with Justinian, yet when he was about to enter the throne chamber, he hesitated and backed out. When people started to ask him what the matter was, he did not say a word, as if he was struck mute, and ran away. When he was asked afterwards why he acted in such a way, he said that he had seen in the palace the Prince of Demons (τῶν δαιμόνων τὸν ἄρχοντα) sitting on the throne, therefore he did not want to come into contact with him or ask for any favours. This passage cements the previous allusions to the vision of Justinian as Antichrist, especially as the “Prince of Demons” phrase is preceded by ἀντικρυς ὥς, “opposite as”, which due to the close phonetic resemblance might invoke an association with Ἀντίχριστος. Procopius inserts here a comment of his own – the emperor never ate or drank to his fill and despite his enthusiasm for sexual plea-

<sup>22</sup> The first to notice the resemblance and the usage of word Ἀκέφαλος was Kajetan Gantar (1961: 1–3).

tures he never slept, only wandered around the palace late in the night. He denied himself everything which makes life pleasurable or sustains it; the historian seems to have arrived at the conclusion that if Justinian was not an ascetic saint, then he must have been a demon, because such conduct is not normal in a man.

The final evidence comes from Theodora (*HA* 12.28–32). Apparently an old story circulated among the courtiers that the empress talked to Macedonia (another dancer) after she had returned to Byzantium in dire financial straits and complained about the unfair treatment from her lover Hekebolos. When Macedonia said that fate may bring her riches yet, Theodora replied that the previous night she had had a dream that she should never worry about money because straight after her arrival in Byzantium she would get into the bed of the Prince of Demons and that she would live as his lawfully married wife and become a mistress of great fortune. The future empress is not portrayed as a demon, but as a human girl who had a vision in her dream. The whole chapter concentrates solely on providing the evidence for Justinian being a demon. I believe that Procopius had already exhausted the subject of Theodora as Semiramis, the apocalyptic Whore of Babylon, and wanted to concentrate on Justinian, for whom he had not provided sufficient evidence up to that point. All the previous hints and allusions are now masterfully collected and coalesced into one picture: Justinian as a half-human, as a being of magic (demon), as Seth or Typhon, the great Dragon of the Apocalypse (Devil), as Antichrist. Irrespective of the point of view, he is perceived as the supreme evil by pagans (as a mythical figure, god of destruction and chaos), everyday practitioners of magic, whatever their religion (as a demon), and Christians (as Antichrist). The argumentation was meant to be convincing on every front, though Procopius distances himself from all the tales, saying that he did not see or hear anything personally, only from trustworthy eyewitnesses. For him, the overwhelming evidence presents itself not in the hearsay, but in the deeds of Justinian, which he proceeds to describe in minute detail in the next seventeen books.

The references to magic in the remaining part of the *Secret History* are scant as Procopius concentrates on dissecting the reforms of Justinian and the manifestations of his numerous vices (greed and blood-lust being the major ones). Nonetheless these references exist, inserted into certain passages. After five books, in *HA* 18.1, Procopius reminds the readers that Justinian was not a man, but a demon who assumed human body, the best evidence of which is the scope of evil he inflicted upon the mankind. Not even God would be able to tell the number of people whom the emperor destroyed (again, a hyperbole). This reminder is purposeful, as the historian proceeds to describe the devastation caused by Justinian's wars. The remark is repeated again in *HA* 18.36–38: the emperor is a demon in human body, whose hidden strength caused many natural disasters (earthquakes, floods and plagues); though some people said that their true cause was the anger of God who turned his back on the depraved Romans and gave the land to the demons to do with them as they wished. Further chapters show how

Justinian murdered people, deprived them of their property and food, laws and customs, professions and education, entertainment (closing down of theatres, the very places where Theodora was born and grew up) and freedom: the Roman citizens, in short, had nothing left to live for. The work concludes with the statement that only after Justinian's death (whether he dies as a normal man or departs from this plane of existence as the Prince of Demons) people who survive his reign will know the truth, thanks to Procopius's work.

There is another magical passage, in *HA* 22. 22–34, which I have not mentioned so far as it is not connected with the main theme of Justinian as a demon: a story of Theodora and Peter Barsymes, *comes sacrarum largitionum* and, from 555 AD, the Pretorian Prefect of the East. Peter, it was rumoured, bewitched Theodora with magical arts to gain her grace. He was very interested in magic and evil spirits, and supported openly the Manicheans. Procopius believes that there was no magical compulsion necessary, as the empress shared the interests of Barsymes: she spent her time among sorcerers and magicians since she had been a child, because she had natural predispositions towards such arts (by the virtue of being a demon herself, though Procopius leaves this unsaid) and till her dying breath she believed in witchcraft and its effects. It was even gossiped that she captured Justinian's interest not with her sexual appeal, but with black magic, as Justinian with his many faults and changeable opinions was very susceptible to magicians. Theodora is pictured here as a parallel to Antonina: an evil witch who controls the emperor. Here Justinian is not portrayed as Antichrist, powerful and great lord of demons, but as a subjugated, weak husband. Yet it is important not to forget that the demons of the magical papyri were great and powerful, too, but they were asked or coerced by the magicians to do their bidding. The subjugation of Justinian does not mean that he was incapable of great evil or had no strength; it means that Theodora was able to use him for her own aims. Procopius reminds the readers that though the majority of his diatribe is against Justinian, Theodora always plays her part. She is a woman ruling over her husband, a personification of the reversal of natural order.

The question that has been unanswered so far is why Procopius decided to use demons as the leitmotif of *Historia Arcana*. Averil Cameron claims that the historian and his contemporaries were bound to explain things they could not comprehend as the actions of demons:

Procopius lived in an age when at any moment it was felt that men could be taken over by demons. Demons offered a ready explanation for misfortune or evil – the natural reverse of the resort to miraculous which was integral to Procopius's historical explanation. Extraordinary events on earth must be explained by references to supernatural forces, either to the incomprehensible providence of God, as with the plague or the sack of Antioch, or to the workings of Devil. One of the main themes of the *Secret History* is Justinian's "lust for slaughter". How else to explain this except by reference to demons; and if one man is responsible, would he not appear as the very prince of the demons himself – Satan or Antichrist (though Procopius does not use that word)? Just as good emperors assumed supra-human characteristics, so Justinian assumed diabolical ones. The mode of thought



was well established in contemporary works, and even though Procopius does not use eschatological language, he surely did mean to imply that Justinian was the Devil incarnate, as earlier 'bad' emperors had seemed to be (1996: 56),

She also adds that the emperor was seen as a being above the human level:

If Christian political theory since Eusebius saw the emperor in a special and supra-human way, it could be envisaged that if ever there was a truly 'bad' emperor, he too must be explained in supernatural terms. We shall see that the *Buildings* set forth the other side of this duality. Between them they recognise that an emperor, and above all an active and innovating emperor ..., is to be seen as having a special relation to the supernatural powers (1985: 57).

Both points are valid. The belief in demons in the Late Empire was common not only among pagans, but also among Christians. Demons caused plagues, draughts, storms and all manner of natural disasters (see Origen, *C. Cels* 1.31). They lusted for blood and the more blood was spilt, the greater power they attained, while without it they grew weak (*Exh. ad Martyr.* 45) – a good explanation for the wish of Justinian and Theodora to conduct so many wars and to slaughter people (and vice versa, an excellent explanation for their unheard-of strength which they gained by taking countless lives). Whether Procopius shared this belief or not is irrelevant at this point: he was aware that others either assumed it as true, or at least had the knowledge of it. Therefore his intended audience would understand the underlying theme of the work and his reasons for depicting the imperial couple as demons.

Emperors were viewed as supernatural beings (before the Empire became Christian they were deemed gods, saints afterwards). People prayed to them for help and protection against danger.<sup>23</sup> The fact that Justinian did nothing to protect his subjects (e.g. from the villainous behaviour of the Blues) only made him more despicable: he failed in his primary role, despite his supernatural role. From an avenging and protecting angel he became a devil incarnate. The devolution from the devil or the Prince of Demons<sup>24</sup> to Antichrist is only a small one: it allowed Procopius to present the emperor as the basest and most despicable being irrespective of the religious paradigm, both from the pagan and Christian viewpoint. Justinian becomes a mythical figure, the worst in the line of the bad emperors, a demon out of magical incantations and tablets, a monster of old religions (Seth-Typhon), an apocalyptic Dragon and Antichrist. Yet despite the shift into the realm of the religious, Procopius believes it is his actions that speak the loudest against him: the myth is a symbol of the evil he wrought upon the empire, not the statement of the objective truth (the enumeration of laws, wars

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<sup>23</sup> For summary of discussion on the subject see C. E. V. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers (1994: 456).

<sup>24</sup> A term often used in the gospels for Satan, e.g. Mt 9:34; 12:24; Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15. See also James W. Boyd 1975: 45.

and innovations comprises, after all, the majority of the *Secret History*). If the myth carried on in the memory of future generations, it would be the best way to teach the future rulers what they should not do, as Procopius implies in the introduction to his work, for the human mind accepts myths more easily than a dry factual narrative. Perhaps this is why he chose to transform Justinian into a demon, a monster and Antichrist: to make him more memorable.

Cameron does not mention another possible reason for the demonic theme: accusations of magic were a standard ploy to be used in a political strife, to augment the critique of the political opponent (or even in absence of any serious arguments to substitute them). Though witchcraft is used by Procopius mainly as a basic charge against Antonina and plays lesser role when it comes to Theodora and Justinian, its importance as a rhetorical device in an invective cannot be overlooked.

A certain role has to be admitted to the conventions of the imperial panegyric,<sup>25</sup> which is subverted by Procopius and turned into an invective. The usual “miraculous” circumstances surrounding the emperor’s birth are replaced by his demonic conception; the sum of his youthful accomplishments is a bloodbath; the imperial virtues (courage, justice, temperance and wisdom) are negated and turned to vices (cowardice, injustice, intemperance and folly); his successes in comparison with his predecessors (of whose only the worst are mentioned, Nero and Domitian) become the greatest disasters for the mankind; the country under his rule does not flourish but is devastated and impoverished. Michael Maas (2005: 433) says that Procopius makes Justinian “unmanly” and Theodora “unwomanly” (mainly due to her lack of chastity and failure as a faithful wife and mother, which a sixth-century Byzantine woman should be): “such inversions overturned the social order and represented the grossest possible insult, thereby indicating to us just how important gendered roles were in the sixth-century Byzantium.” Maas is undoubtedly right:<sup>26</sup> one needs to bear in mind the words of Chosroes about the empire ruled by woman – it is not ruled at all. The gender inversion of the emperor and his wife disrupts the universal order: the wars and internal unrest can only follow when there is no one to truly rule. Yet this is not the complete picture. Justinian and Theodora do not only defy the standards set by the Byzantine society: their conduct is an absolute antithesis of such standards. They become the representations of evil in a male and female shape: two demons, a monster and a witch, Dragon and the Whore of Babylon.

*Historia Arcana* is an invective, a rhetorical accusation and a mythological story: the motif of magic allowed Procopius to integrate all of these into one work, which was supposed to be memorable (to better educate future generations), entertaining (as a work of art), learned (full of literary allusions, to which

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<sup>25</sup> See Menander 371–377.

<sup>26</sup> Especially in case of Antonina and Belisarius, whose relationship becomes a parallel for the one between Theodora and Justinian.

Procopius became partial in the later years of his life) and factual in its expression of the historical truth. Despite the lack of polish, abruptness and some inconsistencies within the text, Procopius achieved his aim. Magical, demonic and apocalyptic themes are undercurrent in his work, giving it more coherence than some scholars would claim.

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## Magia, demony i apokalipsa w *Historii sekretnej* Prokopiusza z Cezarei

### STRESZCZENIE

W *Historii sekretnej* Prokopiusz z Cezarei ukazuje cesarza Justyniana i jego małżonkę Teodorę jako parę demonów pragnących zguby ludzkości. Obraz ów pozostaje w ostrym kontraście z przedstawieniami pary cesarskiej w innych dziełach historyka (*Wojnach* oraz panegirycznych *Budowlach*), stąd też budzi on kontrowersje w świecie nauki. Artykuł ma na celu ukazanie, iż element demonologiczny został kunsztownie wykorzystany przez Prokopiusza jako podstawa do zbudowania inwektywy pod adresem pary cesarskiej: analiza budowy dziełka, metaforyki i słownictwa pozwala stwierdzić, że autor, opierając się na motywach mitycznych, apokaliptycznych i historycznych, konsekwentnie przedstawia Justyniana i Teodorę jako ucieleśnienie zła i przyczynę wszelkich nieszczęść w państwie.

### NOTA AUTORSKA

Justyna Migdał jest doktorantką w Instytucie Filologii Klasycznej Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Obecnie przygotowuje pracę doktorską na temat oskarżeń o czary kierowanych przeciwko cesarzom rzymskim. Jej obszary zainteresowań to starożytna magia, historiografia epoki cesarskiej, biografia cesarska, literatura naukowa starożytnego Rzymu.